

American Association of Geographers 3-Year Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategic Plan

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Introduction

The AAG Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee¹ exists to advise, communicate, and engage AAG leaders, staff, and members on matters promoting justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion both in the organization and the broader geography discipline. Our vision of AAG is a vibrant, welcoming, and just professional organization of geographers that centers justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) and commits to recognition, dignity, belonging, and engagement of all people.

Justice is an umbrella concept that acknowledges the validity of multiple truths, champions dismantling systems and structures that create inequality, and supports replacing them with systems that promote fairness. Fostering a culture of justice creates opportunities for diverse groups of people to thrive together.

Equity ensures everyone has access to the opportunities and resources so that they can thrive. An organization committed to equity therefore seeks to ensure the fair and equal treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time identifying and eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of some formerly excluded groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness by critically examining existing procedures and processes of institutions or systems.

We value diversity and acknowledge all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. We further acknowledge that these differences have been constructed and/or amplified to enable powerful groups to maintain wealth, influence, and standing; thus, our goal is not to remove 'difference' but to address systems of oppression and exploitation based on differentiation. While diversity is often used in reference to race, ethnicity, and gender, we embrace a broader definition of diversity that also includes age, national origin, religion, disability, sexuality, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. We encourage diversity of thought, including ideas, perspectives, and values as an association.

¹ Prior to 2020, this committee was called the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Committee. The committee voted in early 2020 to rename themselves the Diversity & Inclusion (D&I or DI) Committee. During the strategic planning process, the current committee has elected to rename itself the Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) Committee to better align with the breadth of its charge. This new name (JEDI Committee), still pending formal approval, has been incorporated into this document.

Inclusion is the attitude and act of cultivating a positive environment in which all individuals and groups feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.

The AAG and its members must recognize and work towards actively dismantling systems of racism, colonialism, patriarchy/sexism, cis-heteronormativity, ablism, classism, nationalism, and other forms of oppression such as those rooted in religion, ethnicity, nationality, and immigrant status within the AAG and across the discipline of geography at large. We take seriously the goal of creating a relational approach to dismantling oppression, discrimination, and marginalization that addresses multiple and intersectional barriers to inclusion and equity. Benefits of integrating JEDI principles collaboratively enrich opportunities for heightened awareness of geography's relevance in solving urgent real-world problems in an inclusive and just way.

As advisory to the AAG Council, Executive Director and staff, the AAG JEDI Committee proposes three overarching goals (Figure 1) to enhance diversity, promote equity, and foster a more inclusive culture in the AAG:

- 1. Advance AAG leadership capabilities to enable adoption of JEDI principles and progress toward JEDI goals.**
- 2. Establish effective tools for members and geography departments to support JEDI initiatives**
- 3. Integrate JEDI into programs and services within the AAG, geography departments, and the geography discipline.**

The following document recommends actions that the AAG, as an organization, should undertake over the next three years to achieve these goals. Recommendations that fall beyond this time window are also detailed in a future recommendations section.

All recommendations made in this document come from AAG membership, therefore the “we will” statements refer to the AAG at large.

Upon approval by the AAG Council, this document is intended as a strategic framework that will inform and guide an implementation plan. The implementation plan, to be developed collectively by the JEDI Committee and wider membership, will guide prioritization and responsibilities for achieving the goals described in this framework. The AAG Executive Director and staff will have the flexibility to develop appropriate tactical plans to achieve the desired results.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCING JEDI



Figure 1: Strategic Plan Framework for advancing justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) in the AAG.

1. Advancing AAG leadership capabilities for JEDI

Situation

JEDI is not new to AAG. There have been initiatives, programs, and projects including past strategic plans. Previous committees have engaged in matters of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. However, in the past, fragmented efforts fell short of the focus and integration required to optimize impacts and outcomes across AAG. What is needed is a concerted leadership effort to coordinate and integrate all relevant JEDI efforts.

Opportunity

By establishing leadership alignment and increasing capacity, we can unify, coordinate, and manage JEDI work across AAG. This holistic approach begins with the JEDI strategic plan, an engaged JEDI committee, and a dedicated group of JEDI-savvy professionals to provide experience, expertise, and best practices. Next, a review of AAG policies and leadership practices would ensure that they are refreshed to reflect current JEDI principles. Finally, regular collection and analysis of JEDI-specific data can be used to gauge progress.

Recommendations

A. Dedicating Leadership Resources

- **Role of Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) Committee:** Following the AAG Council's mandate, we will maintain a standing committee that will work to advise AAG's leadership and staff, serve as a communication conduit between the AAG and its members, and facilitate action on all JEDI-related matters. The committee's composition should always include one or more dedicated liaisons who also serve on AAG Council.
- **Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) Staff Lead:** We will hire a full-time professional dedicated to coordinating JEDI related matters, in accordance with the AAG's JEDI strategic plan. This person will work in close partnership with the Executive Director, the Executive Committee, AAG Council, and the JEDI Committee.

B. Enhancing AAG Policies and Practices

- **Governance Audit:** We will undertake regular audits of AAG's general governance structures (e.g., Executive Committee, AAG Council, Regional Division boards, headquarters/staff) to identify and address any systemic or structural barriers to achieving JEDI excellence. Regular audits would ensure agility to act, transparency of processes, and continuity of focus through leadership transitions.
- **JEDI Compatible Policies:** We will use the results of continual governance audits to adjust and amend policies to reflect guiding JEDI principles. Additionally, we will foster collaboration between committees, task forces, and other entities engaged in JEDI work (e.g., Anti-Harassment Task Force, Accessibility Task Force).
- **Meeting Agendas:** We will include JEDI as a standing agenda item at all meetings of the AAG Executive Committee and the AAG Council.
- **Equitable Fee Structure:** We will evaluate the current membership fee structure to identify access barriers for formerly excluded member groups. This will inform recommendations for appropriate fee strategies to encourage participation and improve diversity.
- **AAG Membership Recruitment & Retention Strategy:** We will recommend recruitment and retention practices be established to increase the proportion of members from formerly excluded groups and institutions (e.g., MSIs, HBCUs, HSIs, Community Colleges, and Tribal Colleges) across professional and academic spheres.
- **JEDI Compatible Advocacy:** We will not only continue to use advocacy as a tool to advance geography as a discipline, but we will also apply our collective expertise and skills to support policy issues at the intersection of geography and JEDI advancement.

C. Enabling Data-Driven D&I Excellence

- **D&I Data Collection & Management:** We will collect qualitative and quantitative data on members in categories that describe their diverse identities, research specialties (e.g., geographic subfields, AAG specialty groups), departmental affiliations (e.g., geography, geosciences, etc.), and institutional affiliations (e.g., 4-Year college, research university, Community College, MSI, HBCU, K-12). These include, but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, age, ability, and nationality. Additionally, we will collect qualitative and quantitative data on departments, including composition, procedures, policies, and practices. To the extent possible and to avoid duplication, these efforts will be integrated with current data collection initiatives already under way.
- **D&I Data Analytics:** We will analyze these data to find strengths and gaps, to identify intersectionalities, and opportunities for synergies. We would share these results via dashboards, the JEDI webpage, and reports. Data will also be shared with specialty groups to enhance and support their own JEDI advancement efforts.
- **State of D&I Reports:** We will create and share with membership an annual “state of D&I in geography” report that will capture our progress towards JEDI mission and priorities, including the results of the most recent organizational equity audit.
- **Regular Equity Audits:** We will establish a cycle of internal and external audits that will be conducted on a regular basis to ensure we are meeting goals.

2. Establishing AAG organizational tools to support JEDI

Situation

Currently, finding JEDI-related information on the AAG website is difficult. Information is scattered across many submenus and disconnected pages. Cryptic naming conventions for archived projects make them inaccessible to our internal and external audiences. Ambiguity about who is on the JEDI Committee, how to communicate with them, and the overall process of decision making on JEDI matters within AAG creates confusion among members. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of JEDI information contributes to a lack of transparency and is a barrier to the effective advancement of JEDI initiatives across the AAG.

Opportunity

To ensure effective adoption of JEDI principles and practices, we seek to design and operationalize tools that can support AAG leaders, staff, members, and departments. Development and implementation of an effective communication strategy could help grow and sustain JEDI in AAG. Such a strategy, utilizing multiple channels and modes of engagement, would also increase transparency. Additionally, the creation and maintenance

of a comprehensive repository of resources, research, and best practices would enable sharing of JEDI knowledge and foster continual dialogue through training and interactive engagements.

Recommendations

A. Engaging Through Communication

- **Focused Listening Sessions:** We will integrate formal JEDI listening sessions in all our annual and regional meetings to promote optimal and actionable dialogue. Additionally, we will offer JEDI listening sessions as a service at other relevant meetings (e.g., Race, Ethnicity & Place Conference).
- **Interactive JEDI Web Presence:** We will maintain an interactive JEDI webpage as part of the broader AAG website to promote JEDI in Geography and enable two-way communication (e.g., a dedicated email address, anonymous suggestion box) between AAG members, specialty group leaders, JEDI committee members, and AAG staff.
- **Social Media:** We will maintain a social media presence on multiple AAG platforms (e.g., dedicated hashtag(s) on AAG Facebook, Twitter, Instagram pages) to share JEDI-related news and generate discussion among AAG members, specialty group leaders, JEDI committee members, and AAG staff.
- **AAG Newsletter:** We will share JEDI information and publicize opportunities for JEDI-related engagements within the monthly AAG Newsletter.
- **Geography Videos:** We will work with specialty groups to create and publish short videos that profile the research and community action of diverse geographers as well as research and action that promotes social justice through geography. These videos will benefit specialty groups, the AAG, and the wider discipline by showcasing how JEDI principles are intrinsic to geographic research.
- **Truth and Reconciliation Task Force:** We recommend that AAG Council organize a task force to engage with members in defining a process to reconcile geography's unjust past with its potential to dismantle oppression. We envision the task force's purpose as reparative of historical trauma, while the JEDI Committee's focus is to promote justice and equity in the present and future. With some degree of overlapping membership envisioned, the work of this task force will inform and complement the work of the JEDI Committee.

B. Curating JEDI Knowledge

- **Virtual Repository:** We will maintain a space as part of the interactive JEDI web presence to house resources that support knowledge sharing on issues of JEDI in geography. These may include, but are not limited to past projects (e.g., ALIGNED, JustOne Initiative), previously recorded webinars, best practices, and departmental resources (e.g., diversity-oriented recruitment, outreach, advertising materials, and a

JEDI “starter pack” for chairs). To the extent possible and to avoid duplication, these efforts will be integrated with current initiatives already under way.

- **Upcoming Training Resources:** We will make available opportunities for JEDI learning and sustained engagement (e.g., Geography Faculty Development Alliance, department leadership workshops, virtual graduate student learning series) through the interactive JEDI web portal and broader AAG website.

3. Integrating JEDI into Programming

Situation

Geography is not perceived as a welcoming discipline for women, queer and trans people, oppressed racial/ethnic groups, and other individuals from historically excluded populations. There are several interconnected reasons for this. First, modern geography’s roots in white, Western, patriarchal, settler colonial, and cis-heteronormative understandings of the world mean that the discipline has long reflected and perpetuated systems of oppression. Second, there are systematic and structural barriers that limit the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and students. Third, marginalized faculty and students do not necessarily see geography as relevant or reflective of their realities, and as a result, they do not see in it prospects for a well-defined, practical, and impactful career. Together, these elements create impressions of geography that range from antiquated to hostile. While these perceptions exist today, they should not mark geography’s future. Receptivity will only improve if we become intentional about embedding JEDI into standard practices within the AAG and the broader geography discipline.

Opportunity

As one of the world’s preeminent organizations for geography, AAG has a responsibility to spearhead efforts that make the discipline more diverse in its composition, equitable in its practices, and inclusive in its culture. Work must be done simultaneously on three distinct levels. First, within the AAG, embedding JEDI principles comprehensively across programs and specialty areas is needed to foster a more open, inclusive community for current and prospective members. Second, recognizing that diversity, equity, and inclusion are hallmarks of healthy departments, the AAG should aid departments in their efforts to embody JEDI principles. Third and finally, the AAG should create new pathways for engagement with community college educators, K-12 teachers, and their students to cultivate a robust and diverse cadre of emerging geographers. Benefits of integrating JEDI in these ways include enriched opportunities for mentorship, heightened awareness of geography’s relevance in solving urgent real-world problems, a more vibrant community that thrives on harnessing everyone’s highest potential, and a future generation of geographers that better resembles the diversity of identities and worldviews in society.

Recommendations

A. Embedding JEDI in AAG Programming

- **AAG Annual Meetings:** We will organize listening sessions, JEDI-specific plenaries, and with the involvement of specialty groups, curated JEDI research track(s). Additionally, we recommend that the AAG President include at least one meeting theme that is JEDI-focused.
- **AAG Regional Meetings:** We will work with regional division leaders to organize listening sessions and be more intentional about incorporating JEDI principles into the overall meeting design.
- **Specialty Group JEDI Programming:** We will establish an initiative to enable specialty groups to organize programs in support of their own JEDI mission and goals. Developing this initiative will involve further engagement with specialty groups to determine its scope.
- **JEDI Webinar Series:** We will work with the JEDI Committee to conduct regular webinars that spotlight work and experiences in the JEDI arena (e.g., panel discussions, scholars doing JEDI research, student experiences, department experiences, specialty groups).
- **JEDI Leadership Summits:** We will provide forums to support the professional development of current and future leaders in academic and professional geography. Through the exchange of ideas, best practices, and resources, these will promote knowledge, skills, and competencies to lead toward greater justice and equity.

B. Fostering Healthy Departments through JEDI

- **Departmental JEDI Evaluation Tool:** In collaboration with the Healthy Departments Committee, we will develop an evaluation tool for departments and programs (including those based at MSIs, HBCUs, HSIs, and Tribal Colleges) to assess their own status, policies, practices, and progress toward JEDI success. This tool can also help external program reviewers identify opportunities for improvement related to JEDI matters.
- **Department JEDI Award:** We recommend that AAG Council establish an award (e.g., annually or biennially) recognizing a department or program with exemplary JEDI practices.

C. Growing Geography's Next Generation through JEDI

- **Opportunities Assessment with Specialty Groups:** In collaboration with the JEDI Committee, we will liaise with Specialty Groups to identify opportunities to promote JEDI among their graduate student members, particularly members of marginalized groups.
- **Community College Outreach:** We will establish a suite of initiatives to more actively engage with community college stakeholders (e.g., designated AAG membership and

registration level, curated tracks and workshops at Annual Meetings, virtual workshops throughout the year, venues for Regional Meeting participation).

- **Opportunities Assessment for K-12 Participation:** We will examine current AAG programming to identify opportunities for further integrating K-12 teachers and students with academic and professional geography.
- **JEDI Roundtables Beyond AAG:** We will hold roundtable discussions during Advanced Placement exam readings (e.g., A.P. Human Geography, A.P. Environmental Science) and at the National Council for Geographic Education’s annual meeting to foster collaboration between AAG, K-12 teachers, community college educators, and post-secondary geographers in growing a robust and diverse pipeline of future geographers.

FUTURE JEDI FOCUS AREAS

Overview

Although this JEDI strategic plan provides a clear roadmap for AAG to begin unifying its JEDI efforts across the organization, it is not all-inclusive. Realizing a future for AAG that embodies JEDI principles will entail a continuous cycle of planning, action, and evaluation that incorporates a high degree of reflexivity among members and JEDI leaders. This process inevitably stretches beyond the range of the current plan. While the current plan prioritizes recommendations that can be acted upon in the short term, its intention is to lay a firm foundation for longer-term JEDI work. Below are listed ideas that arose during the planning process but fell outside the scope and timeline of the current plan. These recommendations could inform future JEDI efforts in AAG and geography:

Recommendations

- **AAG JEDI Consultant Team for Geography Departments:** In collaboration with the Healthy Departments Committee, we will establish a team to assist departments in their JEDI advancement efforts, including curriculum development, programming, diverse hiring, and inclusive cultural norms.
- **Regular Census of Affiliated Departments:** We will launch an effort to collect and share information on departments that house geographers but are not “geography” departments in name to understand how the AAG might assist them in fostering JEDI principles and practices.
- **Discussion of Hiring and Evaluation Criteria for BIPOC Faculty:** We will acknowledge and amplify existing efforts to discuss issues of uneven expectations for BIPOC faculty and use

these to provide guidance to faculty candidates and institutions to critically examine and improve these practices.

- Outreach to MSIs, HBCUs, HSIs, and Tribal Colleges: We will establish a suite of initiatives to more actively engage with these stakeholders (e.g., designated AAG membership and registration level, curated tracks and workshops at Annual Meetings, virtual workshops throughout the year, venues for Regional Meeting participation, opportunities for student networking, programming and mentorship).
- **K-12 Participation in AAG:** We will develop a suite of initiatives to more actively engage with K-12 stakeholders (e.g., designated AAG membership and registration level, curated tracks and workshops at Annual Meetings, virtual workshops throughout the year, venues for Regional Meeting participation, JEDI tools and programming to support curriculum development).
- **Collaboration with Regional, National & International Associations of Geographers:** We will create pathways and mechanisms to work collaboratively with organizations from the Global North and Global South (e.g., International Geographical Union [IGU], Canadian Association of Geographers [CAG], Royal Geographical Society [RGS-IBG], Society of South African Geographers [SSAG], Geographic Society of Lima, Peru [SGL]) to cultivate a robust and diverse cadre of emerging geographers.
- **Strategic Stakeholder Partnerships Beyond Geography:** We will evaluate potential strategic partnerships with our key stakeholders (e.g., social justice advocacy organizations and other social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences professional organizations) to explore joint programs and projects that can advance JEDI through policy and advocacy.
- Focused Listening Sessions Beyond AAG-Sponsored Meetings: We will develop a strategy to target relevant meetings geared toward professionals and geography-adjacent fields. We will then offer JEDI listening sessions as a service at these venues (e.g., Applied Geography Conference, NACIS, Cultural and Political Ecology Annual Conference, ESRI Users Conference, AGU, Natural Hazards Workshop).